

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2466

INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

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TAGS: PFOR, SN, AS

SUBJ: LIBERAL OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN SAYS

CONTINUED U.S. PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST

ASIA IS ESSENTIAL TO REGIONAL STABILITY

REF: SINGAPORE 0438

1. SUMMARY: IN SPEECH IN MELBOURNE FEB. 4, LIBERAL
OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN SAID AUSTRALIA MAY HAVE TO
REASSESS STRATEGIC SITUATION IN ASIA RESULTING FROM
GROWING SINO-SOVIET ANTAGONISM TO ALLOW FOR QTE RIPPLES
OF DESTABILIZATION END QTE CAUSED BY COMPETITION BETWEEN
SOVIET UNION AND CHINA. IN THIS SITUATION HE SAID
CONTINUED U.S. PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA IS ESSENTIAL
AND THAT AUSTRALIA SHOULD ENCOURAGE U.S. TO MAINTAIN
MILITARY FORCES IN AREA. END SUMMARY.

2. IN SPEECH TO NATIONAL CONVENTION OF YOUNG LIBERAL

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MOVEMENT IN MELBOURNE FEB 4, LIBERAL OPPOSITION LEADER SNEDDEN

SAID AUSTRALIA MAY HAVE TO REASSESS ITS ENTIRE STRATEGIC PICTURE OF ASIA TO ALLOW FOR POSSIBLE QTE RIPPLES OF DESTABILIZATION END QTE CAUSED BY COMPETITION BETWEEN SOVIET UNION AND CHINA. SNEDDEN SPOKE ONLY FROM NOTES, BUT HIS STAFF TELLS US THAT EXCERPTS FROM AUSTRALIAN AND MELBOURNE AGE, SUMMARIZED BELOW, FAIRLY REFLECT THRUST OF HIS THINKING. DEPT WILL NOTE CLOSE PARALLEL BETWEEN THESE REMARKS AND HIS CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR CRONK IN SINGAPORE, REPORTED IN REFTEL.

3. SNEDDEN SAID THERE WAS NO DOUBT THAT COMPETITION BETWEEN SOVIET UNION AND CHINA WOULD CAUSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR AUSTRALIA. HE SAID, "I DON'T KNOW WHEN IT WILL COME, BUT ALL THE SIGNS ARE THERE THAT IT WILL COME". HE SAID AUSTRALIA'S ROLE SHOULD BE TO ENCOURAGE A CONTINUING AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND TO MAINTAIN THE ANZUS PACT AND FPDA. HE ADDED, "WITHOUT U.S. PRESENCE, THERE CAN'T BE THE STABILITY THAT IS SO IMPORTANT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR NATION. IT'S LIKE A THREE-LEGGED STOOL. A THREE-LEGGED STOOL CAN STAND UP A HELL OF A LOT BETTER THAN A TWO-LEGGED STOOL," HE CONTINUED THAT IN ANY COMPETITION BETWEEN SOVIET UNION AND CHINA THE ASEAN COUNTRIES WOULD BE PRESSURED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES. HE STATED, "EVERYWHERE I'VE GONE, EVERYBODY AGREES THAT THIS IS THE BIG DANGER. EVEN CHINA SEES IT THAT WAY. IT'S NOT READY TO HAVE A CONFRONTATION WITH THE SOVIET UNION. I FEEL CERTAIN THAT AT THIS STAGE CHINA DOESN'T WANT TO SEE THE U.S. PRESENCE ENDED. THEY CAN SEE IN IT A CONTRIBUTION TO OVERCOMING THESE TENSIONS."

4 DRAWING IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN POLICY, SNEDDEN SAID THAT AUSTRALIA "IS NOT PART OF ASIA, NOT EVEN IN THE VIEW OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES IS IT PART OF SOUTHEAST ASIA. WHAT AUSTRALIA IS TO DO IS NOT TO JOIN THE REGION BUT TO ESTABLISH A PERMANENT CONTACT WITH THE REGION, AND IT MUST BUILD UP AND MAINTAIN BILATERAL CONTACTS WITH THE REGION".

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5. SNEDDEN NOTED THAT AUSTRALIAN LABOR GOVERNMENT WAS RELYING ON A STRATEGY THAT THERE WOULD BE NO DIRECT THREAT TO AUSTRALIA FOR 10 YEARS, USING THIS TO JUSTIFY RUNNING DOWN AUSTRALIAN ARMED FORCES AND FIREPOWER AND WITHDRAWING FROM FPDA. SUCH A WITHDRAWAL IS ALSO A CAPITULATION TO PRESSURE FROM LEFT WING WITHIN AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY.

6. COMMENT: WHILE SNEDDEN IS UNDOUBTEDLY SINCERELY CONVINCED OF CORRECTNESS OF ABOVE VIEWS, THERE IS INEVITABLE ELEMENT OF POLITICAL CONVENIENCE CONTAINED IN THEM. HE IS AWARE THAT SUCH REMARKS ARE MUCH MORE PALATABLE TO U.S. THAN LINE RECENTLY FOLLOWED BY PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM, AND HE PROBABLY JUDGES THAT THEY WILL BE WELCOME TO CONSIDERABLE AUSTRALIAN AUDIENCE. MOREOVER, INFLUENTIAL ELEMENTS IN LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTIES, AS WELL AS DEMOCRATIC LABOR PARTY, HAVE EXPRESSED VIEW THAT LIBERAL ELECTORAL STRATEGY IN 1972 OF DOWNPLAYING DEFENSE AND FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES WAS TACTICAL ERROR WHICH WORKED TO ADVANTAGE AND VICTORY OF ALP. LIBERAL PARTY WILL BEGIN NEXT WEEK DEBATE ON DRAFT PARTY PROGRAM LOOKING TOWARDS NEXT ELECTION. WE UNDERSTAND THAT FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES WILL RECEIVE CONSIDERABLE EMPHASIS IN PROGRAM, THOUGH DOMESTIC ISSUES SUCH AS INFLATION, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND SOCIALISM WILL ALSO BE EXTENSIVELY COVERED.

7. WE EXPECT TO BE MEETING WITH SNEDDEN IN NEXT SEVERAL DAYS WHEN HE IS IN CANBERRA AND WILL EXPLORE HIS VIEWS IN FURTHER DETAIL. END COMMENT.
HARROP

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